

# Improving Laws to Protect LGBT Sex Workers & Promote HIV Prevention/Care

## Preliminary Findings



# The purpose of this study is to examine...

- ❑ The impact of laws and policies on the lives and health of sex workers
- ❑ How sex workers in DC interact with law enforcement, health and social services
- ❑ The effect of policies designed to disrupt the sex trade on access to HIV prevention and care services

# Prostitution-related offenses in D.C. include...

- ❑ Engaging or Soliciting
- ❑ Arranging for Prostitution
- ❑ Anti-Trafficking Laws
- ❑ Anti-Manager Laws

# The study design

- ❑ 3 Focus Groups with Sex Workers
- ❑ 12 Interviews with Stakeholders
- ❑ Policy Recommendations

It's **survival** to me. That's what makes me want to do sex work because I don't like asking people for money.

Sex work to me is **survival** and it's a skill, because to be honest I'm good at it.

It's physically, mentally, and spiritually draining.

# Sex Work is...

Sex work to me is **survival** of the fittest.

Sex work to me has become a way of life.

It was first out of necessity to help my family.

## Focus groups demographics

- ❑ Ages between 20 and 50
- ❑ Over half identified as trans
- ❑ Most were African American
- ❑ Half had completed high school or received a GED
- ❑ Almost half were homeless or lived in shelters

# Themes identified in focus groups

- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Employment
- ☐ Interactions with the police
- ☐ Health and wellbeing
- ☐ Trust
- ☐ Self blame
- ☐ Resilience
- ☐ Sex work law reforms

# HOUSING

**When I have housing,  
I feel like everything  
else falls into place.**

**It goes back to  
housing and not  
having food.**

- ☐ Primary concern
- ☐ Medication adherence
- ☐ Mental health & peace of mind
- ☐ Not enough housing advocacy
- ☐ Fewer police interaction



# EMPLOYMENT

**If I had a job, I don't have to worry about tricking. I would rather wait for that two weeks knowing that when I do get my paycheck I can be safe.**

**They locked me up,  
I lost the job, didn't get  
out until 4 o'clock in the  
morning.**

- ☐ Need for legal employment
- ☐ Criminal record is a barrier
- ☐ Most would stop trading sex if they had a legal job

# POLICE INTERACTION

**I'm very nice to the police but they still treat me like a criminal. It kind of hurts sometimes. I feel like I was just doing what I had to do to get somewhere, trying to better myself and they don't understand the struggle that we go through.**

- ☐ LGBTQ cultural competency
- ☐ LGBT Liaison Unit
- ☐ Harassment & stigma
- ☐ Indoor vs stroll
- ☐ "Losing everything"
- ☐ Trust
- ☐ Self blame

# HEALTH & WELLBEING

**Since I found out I got an STD I use protection and I don't even have sex like I used to. I don't even know who I got it from I don't trust nobody no more.**

**Mental Health  
plays a big part  
of our everyday  
being**

- ☐ Hormone access
- ☐ Physical safety
- ☐ HIV treatment & prevention
- ☐ Mental health
- ☐ Incarceration effects

You need to find someone you can **trust**, not only your primary care provider, that you can let things out

It's a **trust** issue and you don't know who to go to or which way to turn so you just stay to yourself

It gets to the point that I don't **trust** the police, its trauma.

# Trust matters...

I don't even know who I got it (STD) from I don't **trust** nobody no more.

We take things into our own hands.

What am I going to do if I feel like I can't **trust** the police.

When it comes to violence and stuff with the police and the girls, it's **how you handle that situation** when the police stops you.

I think this violence or harassment from the police be **for certain girls in certain areas.**

Either you going to sit there and **be calm and patient or** you going to sit there and be nasty and they are going to drag you.

# Self blame...

**If you look unpresentable** and like busted the police are not going to treat you seriously and are going to disrespect you and treat you all types of ways.

It also depends on **how you carry yourself** in those areas and situations that will determine if things happen to you or not.

**You're looking for something to happen**  
[if you carry a knife for protection]

# RESILIENCE

**I can remember when I first started escorting and my grandmother's house burned down... to see the twinkle in her eye when I said grandma I got this money for the roof.**

**We take things into our own hands.**

- ☐ Survival nature of sex work
- ☐ Self accountability
- ☐ Risk taking
- ☐ Pride

# SEX WORK LAW REFORMS

**It should be regulated in some manner. There should be some cops that are there to protect the sex workers.**

**I don't think the trick should be penalized for picking me up. Then I won't make money because you've scared him from coming back out.**

- ☐ Unanimous support for reforming sex work laws in DC
- ☐ More support for legalization
- ☐ Include social resources in reform efforts
- ☐ Willingness to report crimes

# Stakeholder interviews

- ☐ Lawyers
- ☐ Lawmakers
- ☐ Department of Health
- ☐ Office of Police Complaints
- ☐ Anti-trafficking advocates
- ☐ Metropolitan Police  
Department
- ☐ DC ACLU



# Main topics in stakeholder interviews

- ☐ Criminal record implications
- ☐ Poverty
- ☐ Social services
- ☐ Sex trafficking
- ☐ Interactions with the police
- ☐ Health and wellbeing
- ☐ Trust
- ☐ Community education
- ☐ Sex work law reforms